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AUTHOR Valdivieso, Jorge
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ABSTRACT

Spanish language training at the Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management is discussed, focusing on the instructional materials and classroom techniques used in advanced Spanish conversation classes. While traditional materials (dialogues, dictation, literature, mass media, video- and audiotapes) and learning activities (recitation, grammar exercises, composition writing, oral and written reports, role-playing, classroom presentations) are used in the intensive courses, emphasis is placed on materials addressing the professional needs of professionals in international business. Specific examples of classroom teaching techniques and materials are described, including pronunciation exercises, dictation, dialogues, magazines, composition writing, reading aloud, and study of novels. A chart indicating time allotments for activities in each day's language class is included. (MSE)

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TRADITIONAL MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES USED AS INSTRUCTIONAL DEVICES IN AN ADVANCED BUSINESS SPANISH CONVERSATION CLASS *

Jorge Valdivieso

With the ever-increasing need for the citizens of this country to develop an awareness and a readiness for active participation in a "global economy", no academic discipline can meet this challenge as successfully as the study of foreign languages. But for a foreign language to be meaningful in the context of a global economy, it has to address itself to what is most important: the content of the linguistic discourse as a prerequisite for the pragmatic use of the skills acquired by the student in the future exercise of his/her professional tasks.

In Thunderbird, the American Graduate School of International Management, we have reexamined the old cliché that "the bilingual man is worth two men". For it is true that he is his own spokesman and his own interpreter, but what is more important is the content of his discourse. Our main objective in the Department of Modern Languages, within the framework of a tripartite curriculum, is therefore to equip our students with the linguistic skills and cultural sensitivity necessary for them to perform successfully as international managers.

Certainly, our language program provides our students with a command of a foreign tongue, an appreciation of foreign cultures, and an acceptance of specific patterns of behavior; but in addition to that goal, our language courses strive for attaining the following pragmatic instructional objective: to use the

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foreign language program as a medium for transmitting and acquiring knowledge in functional academic disciplines, thus making our students capable of performing their professional tasks in a foreign country in a foreign language.

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This paper is a succint report about the manner in which traditional instructional materials and techniques are used in advanced conversation Spanish classes for graduate students pursuing a master's degree in international management at Thunderbird. Due to the limitted time our students spend with us, the Department of Modern Languages has designed a series of courses that speed up the process of acquiring an acceptable level of linguistic proficiency, appropriate for the professional demands of an international manager.

The advanced conversation Spanish course is the "capstone" for many of our students who complete their degree in a calendar year. They take three, two, or one semester of Spanish depending on whether they start their language training at the beginning level, intermediate level, or advanced level. This conversation course includes learning activities to develop the students' reading and writing skills as an important component of their language training.

The term "traditional instructional materials and techiniques" encompasses the usual dialogues, dictation, novels, magazine articles, video-tapes, audio-tapes, films, etc., as well as learning activities such as recitation, grammar exercises,

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writing of compositions, oral and written reports, role-playing, speeches, etc. What makes the difference perhaps is our approach that concentrates on the student--student centered approach--the intensive pace of our instruction, and the emphasis on materials that deal with the professional needs of future international businessmen and businesswomen.

* * * * * *

Let us look at the lesson plans we use in our conversation Spanish course. It is apparent how "structured" the activities are and how specific the distribution of time is. We immediately realize that the activities follow the accepted pedagogical and psycholinguistic tenets of organizing them according to the degree of effort they require--from introductory activities, up to developing activities, and down to culminating activities.

Our lesson plans also respond to our concern with the pedagogical implications of the time allotted to each learning activity. First, it is important to keep in mind what educational research has demonstrated: that the learner's span of attention when performing a demanding task cannot be sustained longer than 30 minutes without changing the pace and/or the intensity of the activity. In fact, if each of the activities called for in the lessons is analized, we would become aware of the following characteristics:

A. Our <u>pronunciation exercise</u>--an introductory activity consisting of a simple repetition drill--lasts approximately one minute. The purpose of this exercise is three-fold: 1) it is a

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psychological devise that facilitates the learner's transition from an English environment to one where the target language is spoken; 2) it is a physiological devise that helps the learner adjust his phonic organs to the demands of the foreign linguistic system he will be using in the class; and 3) it is a phonemic teaching instrument that allows the teacher to model certain foreign sounds that by contrast constitute difficult phonemes to be mastered by the student.

B. Dictation, as an effective teaching device, it was often neglected by the proponents of the audio-lingual method. Objections of all kinds were raised against dictation, but research and class experience have demonstrated that it is a very effective way of correcting the errors that students make due to confusion about the two orthographic systems they are confronted with. Dictation is also an effective exercise that helps the student in the process of learning how to transfer foreign phonemes into foreign graphemes. For our students, who will constantly be required to write what they hear, it is of paramount importance to become skillful enough to follow lectures, reports, instructions, radio and TV programs, telephone calls, and then transfer the core of the oral text simultaneously into a written version.

C. Dialogues have always been a bone of contention for teachers, researchers, and students of foreign languages. In our case, the use of dialogues has proven to be successful at the three levels of instruction, but the reliance on this teaching devise is

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limited to one dialogue per week at the advanced level.

The rationale behind the use of this activity is perfectly known by all the members of our profession: 1) the dialogue offers the student the segmental as well as the suprasegmental features of the language for him to master, manipulate, and use according to his needs and 2) it presents to the student segments of the target language more in agreement with the way we communicate in real-life situations--conversing with other human beings.

The success of dialogues in our language program is probably due to the following reasons: a) all situations portrayed in the dialogues deal with matters relevant to the professional needs of our students and b) our dialogues incorporate additional technical vocabulary and idiomatic expressions which are immediately used in class in what we call "dialogue adaptation", an exercise that offers our students the opportunity to be creative and to realize that dialogues are only models that can be modified and used to respond to their personal needs for communication.

D. Magazines published in the Spanish language are used as the source of articles dealing with current economic, social, political, and cultural events in Spanish speaking countries or in the entire world. Actual copies of a carefully chosen magazine are given to the students in the class with the conscious purpose of exciting their curiosity so that, in addition to the assigned articles, they will read or at least look at advertisements, pictures, and other items of interest to

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them.

From these magazines, a student selects an article that the class will discuss in groups of 2 to 3 students under the direction of a "leader" who is responsible for the participation of the members of his group. It is not a "summary" of the article that we expect them to give, but rather an exchange of opinions, as if they were discussing an article that everyone had read in a magazine published in their mother tongue.

E. The composition. Our students have read the article and have discussed it in class. Now they are ready to write a one-page composition in class on a topic chosen by the teacher that he has in turn chosen from the topics initiated by the students during the oral activity.

We are aware of the old controversy between the proponents of "quality" vs. "quantity" in writing compositions in a second language. Our position is somewhere in-between. We do not want either to curtail our students' creativity or to ask them to produce an extensive piece of writing which may subject them to the danger of making many mistakes or to fall into the temptation of padding their work in order to turn in a long composition.

Compositions are not graded, but they are returned to the students with conventional symbols that call to their attention their errors. Students make as many corrections as they can and hand their compositions back to their teacher who in turn reviews the results of their efforts and uses their work for error analysis, grammatical explanations or stylistic remarks when the

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program calls for a "grammar review".

F. Speeches are included in our program both, for pedagogical as well as for professional reasons. They are short presentations--4 minutes, at the most--on topics chosen by each student from his personal experiences, interests or private readings. After the speech, questions are asked by the audience, and the orator is finally rewarded with a round of applause. The teacher corrects a few "glaring" mistakes at a brisk pace and asks the second (and last) student to give his speech.

Our experience tells us that many of our graduates have the opportunity to secure important positions in Spanish speaking countries upon their graduation. Since Spanish speaking people expect that persons in authority will give speeches, our classroom has to be the place where our students overcome their fear to speak in public. These short speeches are not to be read by the student so he will learn how to be able to establish the desired rapport with his audience. Therefore this activity is part of our lesson plans in order to train our students for this future professional demand.

G. Our reading-aloud exercise has a very important dual purpose: a linguistic objective, and a professional goal. As the dictation prepares the student for the process of transfering phonemes into graphemes, so the reading-aloud exercise teaches him how to put into sounds what he sees. The phonemic aim of this activity is to present a text so that the student associates the appropriate sounds he is learning in contrast with the units

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and symbols of his native language that in many cases interfere with the foreign system of sounds.

The professional benefit is the training the student is receiving so that when the professional situation occurs, he, as an international manager, will be able to read aloud reports, papers, and other materials to audiences that might not be as friendly as his classmates.

H. Novels have proven to be effective teaching devises in the learning process of a foreign language for graduate students of international business.

A novel is a work of literature that best presents reality. It is like a mirror where the lives of the characters are projected in their entirety. Novels, better than any other gendre, emcompass the situations most likely to be encountered by our students.

In our program, the choice of novels is the first difficulty we have to face. Our students are not prepared to do a literary analysis of the book they are reading. They are sophisticated men and women, but not in the area of literary criticism. On the other hand, they are graduate students, mature enough to be able to discuss a book with intelligence and keen insight.

The teaching technique we recommend is simple but very effective. The time allotted--approximately 24 minutes--is subdivided into three equal segments devoted to the following activities: 1) a summary of what happens in the pages assigned for their reading; 2) questions and answers to test each other's comprehension and

to clarify any doubt on the meaning of the text and the situations; and 3) a debate to give the students a chance to show their emotions, and to express themselves in an argumentative manner in a foreign language. All the segments of this activity are performed in pairs. The last task of this activity is the assignment of a composition--a written summary of the pages the students read and discussed in class.

* * * * * *

At this point, we ought to ask ourselves this question: What does the teacher do while all of these activities are taking place?

The answer to this question is what has been discussed for centuries in the halls of our universities: What is the role of the teacher in education?

It suffices to say that for these techniques to be effective, the teacher has to relinquish his position of being the "central figure" in the drama of learning, and to accept the role of being a "facilitator", a "catalyst" always alert, always ready to direct, to encourage, to guide, and to reward.

I would like to end my presentation paraphrasing what two pioneers of foreign language teaching said 40 years ago. Betty J. Wallace of the University of Michigan wrote in 1953:

> The ultimate success of the student in learning a foreign language depends a great deal upon the teacher's ability to maintain a wholesome atmosphere in the classroom and to take into consideration the

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individual differences on the students.

And Earl W. Stevick of Scarrit College stated in 1963:

> ... even if "technemes" [a term he used to refer to "teaching techniques"] are all that we have said they are, and even if teachers everywhere began to organize and conduct their classes with technemes in mind, good teaching would not have become a mechanical procedure. Technemes are only the pigments. It still takes the hand of an artist to blend them into a masterpiece.

Jorge H. Valdivieso, Ph.D. American Graduate School of International Management

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SP 4010: CONVERSACION AVANZADA

DISTRIBUCION DEL TIEMPO PARA LAS ACTIVIDADES EN CLASE

Lunes:

1.	Pronunciación	1 min.
2.	Discursos (preguntas y correcciones)	16 min.
3.	Revista (discusión y correcciones)	20 min.
4.	Composición	13 min.

Martes:

1.	Pronunciación	1 min.
2.	Diálago (recitado y correcciones)	12 min.
3.	Adaptación del diálogo y correcciones	12 min.
4.	Presentación del diálogo	25 min.

Miércoles:

1.	Pronunciación	1 min.
2.	Dictado	10 min.
3.	Lectura	15 min.
4.	*Caso o novela (resumen, preguntas, debate)	24 min.

Jueves:

El tiempo de clase en este día será usado para la práctica de expresiones idiomáticas, repaso gramatical o para ejercicios de comprensión y conversación sobre la Videocinta. 50 min.

* El estudiante debe escribir una composición en casa sobre un tema relacionado con el caso o la novela que se ha discutido en clase.